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1977-78 GRIZZLY OUTLOOK

by
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UM Sports Information Director

Moving into his second season as Grizzly head basketball coach, Jim Brandenburg has set several goals for this basketball season.

"Once again we'll shoot for the top four in the Big Sky and be competitive throughout the season," Brandenburg said. "Last season we gained confidence in our ability to win on the road and we established ourselves as a consistent winner. To attain our goals, we must get help on the frontline and improve our outside shooting."

The only proven starter returning to the Grizzly camp is 6-5 senior co-captain Michael Ray Richardson. "Sugar Ray" saw action mostly at forward last season, but will move back to the guard spot where he played as a freshman. Richardson averaged 19.2 points per game last season, grabbed 8.6 rebounds a game and handed out 3.6 assists. He's a two-time all-Big Sky first team choice, two-time team most valuable player and enters this season as the fifth highest scorer in UM history. Considered by many to be the outstanding player in the Big Sky Conference this season, Michael Ray Richardson is a candidate for All-America honors.

"Michael Ray has played the entire cycle," Brandenburg said. "As a freshman, he was a defensive specialist at guard. As a sophomore, he became an offensive threat at both guard and forward. Last season he scored and rebounded with the best in the league playing mostly at forward. He's seen all kinds of defenses the opposition has come up with in an effort to stop him. I think he's matured now to where he can handle anything on the court."

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Moving Michael Ray back to guard is a big step and Brandenburg has reservations about it.

"With M.R. back at guard and Michael John Richardson graduated, we've lost our top two inside rebounders. Our ability to control the boards is now somewhat of an uncertainty," Brandenburg said. "Who will materialize to play inside and the other guard spot are two big question marks."

The Grizzlies must get front line help from juniors Craig Henkel (6-7), Charlie Yankus (6-6) and Allan Nielsen (6-6). All three saw quite a bit of playing time last season. Henkel started the last half of January and most of February.

"For our team to be successful this season the three juniors must show vast improvement and become major contributors to the program," Brandenburg said.

Senior co-captain Jim Molloy (6-2) is a contender for the other starting guard spot. His experience and backcourt savvy are major pluses.

Two redshirt players, freshman Blaine Taylor (6-1) and sophomore Rick Zanon (6-0) are also contenders for starting spots. Both were sidelined last year with injuries.

Sophomore Tim McCauley (6-1½) gained valuable experience last season with the junior-varsity squad and will also be contending at guard.

A lot of weight falls on the big shoulders of sophomore center Jonn Stroeder (6-9½, 238) this year. Stroeder is being counted on heavily to play the post position like a seasoned veteran. Backing him up will be freshman Marty Green (6-9).

Sophomore Rick Nelson (6-6) is working hard to battle for a place at forward.

Three freshmen will also see playing time this year. Rodney Brandon (6-6), Craig Zanon (6-6) and Dennis Gay (6-2½) could figure into immediate court plans.

"There's no doubt that our freshmen are going to play this year," Brandenburg said. "Rodney Brandon, Craig Zanon, Dennis Gay and Marty Green are outstanding additions to our basketball program and they will definitely be challenging our returning lettermen."

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The Grizzlies lost two fine seniors in guard Ben DeMers and forward-center Michael John Richardson. "It will be a most difficult task to replace Ben and Michael John," Brandenburg said. DeMers was an outstanding defensive player with fine outside shooting ability. Richardson was the Big Sky's leading rebounder (11.3 per game) and leading field goal shooter (56%) last season.

"With only two seniors on the team, we are still a relatively young and inexperienced ball club," Brandenburg said. "Therefore, we can expect the team to improve as the season progresses. We hope this improvement will not be too late."

Brandenburg said the team must establish itself as a winner on the road and be able to win some early conference road games. Five of Montana's first six Conference games are on the road.

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